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Sermon for Advent.

GEN. 49, 8—12.

The observance of the Advent season, comprising the four weeks preceding Christmas, is one of the most pleasant and salutary customs of our church. It is not, indeed, of divine institution, but the mode and manner of its observance is in perfect accord with God's will and in strict compliance with His demand. For when Christ says: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me," He expressly charges us to study the Old Testament Scriptures with all diligence, in order to find that all prophecies of the Messiah have been fulfilled in His person and office, and, therefore, to believe in Him as the only Redeemer of mankind. And this is precisely what we do in our Advent services: we search the oracles of the prophets, and, comparing them with the words of the New Testament writings, we perceive the marvelous correspondence of their fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth, and thus are more fully persuaded that He is the Sent of God who came to save that which was lost.

How could we find a time more opportune for such study of the prophecies than the season immediately before Christmas? The joyous time of the celebration of Messiah's birth is fast approaching, and all Christians ought to unite in praising God for the greatest miracle, the birth of His Son, our Savior. But how can they praise Him if they are not fully persuaded that Jesus, born at Bethlehem, is the true Messiah and Immanuel, God with us? It is evident, then, that our observance of Advent, conducing as it does to the strengthening of our faith in Christ, is calculated to make us the happiest of Christmas celebrators.

Any one of these prophecies, clearly fulfilled, is enough to satisfy honest doubt and to help us to identify the Messiah. Let us

devote this service to the consideration of one of these wonderful vaticinations. It is contained in the prophetic forecast of the future history of Jacob's sons and their tribes, and was uttered by Jacob, under divine inspiration, shortly before the patriarch's death. We speak of

THE COMING OF SHILOH, THE PEACEFUL.

We learn:

- I. *What is predicted concerning Him;*
- II. *How this prediction was fulfilled.*

I.

Jacob, the third and last of the great patriarchs, had spent the evening of his life in Egypt, near his son Joseph, and in the midst of all his other children. Few and evil had been the days of the years of his life, and his pilgrimage was now at an end. He was ready to depart and to be gathered to his fathers. But before he closed his eyes in death, he was moved by the Holy Spirit to pronounce upon each of his sons, who were gathered around his deathbed, the blessing belonging to him—"every one according to his blessing he blessed them." He told them what should befall them and their posterity in future days. And his words were not mere wishes, nor simple prayers, but actual predictions, for he was gifted for the occasion with divine inspiration. He was the heir of the covenant blessing, special revelations having been made to him; and of all the blessings he pronounced upon his sons the greatest was that concerning the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham and Isaac, in whom all nations were to be blessed. Undoubtedly all the sons of the dying patriarch were anxious to learn who was to be designated as the progenitor of the Messiah. Reuben was the firstborn; but he had forfeited his birthright by a most grievous sin and did not receive the coveted distinction. Now it might seem that Jacob would select his beloved son Joseph in Reuben's place, and who knows but that Jacob had designed to do so if he had been allowed to make the choice. But right here we see that God inspired him to pronounce these blessings; for neither Joseph nor Benjamin, neither Simeon nor Levi, but Judah, the fourth of his sons, is designated as the progenitor of the promised Seed. We see, then, that the prediction of Jacob was a distinct step forward in the march of prophecy. First, Messiah was promised as the seed of the woman; then the family of Shem was chosen as the heir of the covenant promise; then the seed of Abraham; then Jacob; and now Judah receives the promise that "in his Seed all the nations of the

earth are to be blessed; unto Him shall be the gathering of the people."

But besides designating the family from which Christ was to spring, Jacob also predicts the exact time of His coming. He says: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver" (*i. e.*, the ruler's staff) "from between his feet, until Shiloh come." Judah is to be the prince, the leader, the ruler of the tribes of Israel; "his hand shall be in the neck of his enemies, and his father's children shall bow down before him." In war, he is to be the hero, the chieftain, the champion, whose supremacy will be acknowledged by the tribes; in peace, he is to be as a lion resting after having subdued his enemies, and "no one shall dare rouse him up." But, subsequently, a great change is to take place: the earthly, temporal supremacy of Judah is to come to an end, the earthly kingdom and scepter shall depart, and, instead, there shall be greater glory and majesty, in that Shiloh, the greatest hero of Judah's tribe, will rule the nations with a scepter of spiritual power; and not only the children of Jacob, but also the peoples, the nations and families of the whole world, shall obey and serve Him.

And, finally, in addition to the designation of the family and of the time of Messiah's coming, the character of this wonderful Prince and Ruler, and of His spiritual kingdom, are foretold in this unique oracle. His name shall be "Shiloh," *i. e.*, the Peaceful, or, He that makes peace and rules peacefully. He is to make peace: when Shiloh comes, all the enemies of God's chosen people are to be subdued; He will overcome and destroy them as a strong lion, and, after the fierce battle, there is to be peace in His kingdom, the most lasting and perfect peace, peace which no enemy dare disturb. This peace is to be to all peoples; all that render homage to Him shall be gathered to Him and enjoy the blessings of His kingdom. And which are they? They are described in poetic and figurative language in our prophecy. Wine and blood of the grapes and milk are named as the rich blessings of Messiah's rule. So plentiful and abundant they are to be that garments are to be washed in wine and in the blood of the grape. The kingdom of Shiloh is to flow with milk and wine. The meaning of this metaphorical language is to be gathered from the words of Isaiah: "With joy ye shall draw water out of the wells of salvation." Milk, wine, water, drawn from the wells of the kingdom of Christ, are the fullness of the spiritual gifts necessary for our salvation, *i. e.*, forgiveness of sins, peace, and rest for our soul, joy in the Holy Spirit, and the living hope of everlasting life. These are to be found, and abundantly, fully to be enjoyed in the kingdom of Shiloh.

Thus we have, in this oracle of Jacob, uttered eighteen hundred years before the occurrence of the events foretold, the designation of the family from which Messiah was to spring, the time of His coming, and the character of His person and kingdom. And now observe the fulfillment!

II.

“I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,” thus Jacob sighed to God while pronouncing these blessings. He had waited and longed for the coming of Shiloh, the salvation of God’s promise. But he died and was gathered to his fathers before Shiloh appeared, and, likewise, his children of many generations lived and died in faith and hope of Shiloh, without seeing Him in the flesh. However, “when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman,” and this woman, the mother of Christ according to the flesh, was Mary, a daughter of the house of David, a descendant of the heroic tribe of Judah. “It is evident, therefore, that our Lord sprang out of Judah,” Hebr. 7, 14. So this is one of the specific statements of this prophecy clearly fulfilled.

Now mark the specification in regard to time. All of the future events in the tribe of Judah are in perfect agreement with the statements of this prediction. Judah was the leader of the tribes, when they conquered and took possession of the promised land of Canaan. He was first in war, first in peace, no tribe questioning his right to rule. But there was greater glory in store for him. David, the king, the beloved of God, was of the tribe of Judah, and he was like unto a mighty lion who subdued all the enemies of Israel, so that Solomon, his son and successor, could rule the great nation in peace and prosperity. But even this was not the climax. Greater glory, more power, sweeter peace, and more enduring majesty were yet to come, not, indeed, in a kingdom of this world,—for the scepter must depart from Judah,—but in the spiritual kingdom of Shiloh. It is then that the supremacy, glory, and majesty of Judah shall be brought to perfection, and far excel, surpass, and overshadow all the splendor of former days. And so it did, and still does. The prophecy is fulfilled. The scepter of Judah is departed, the earthly supremacy of the Jewish nation is forever lost. The descendants of Judah are no longer a nation, but simply a scattered race. But at the very time when the scepter departed Shiloh came, the Lion of the tribe of Judah established His spiritual kingdom, and that shall never pass away, but endure in this world as long as the sun and moon shall shine, and thenceforth continue to flourish as the kingdom of glory from everlasting to everlasting.

And, finally, consider the specification as to the character of Messiah and His reign. My hearers, what name could have been given to Him more fitting and appropriate than "Shiloh," the Peaceful? On His birth-night the heavenly host sang: "Glory to God in the highest, *peace* on earth, good will toward men," and, verily, He came to make peace and to give peace to all the weary and laboring children of men. He made peace by subduing the most terrible enemies of the human race, sin, death, and the devil. In a fierce battle, more wonderful and decisive than any of David's or Judah's before that day, He bruised the Serpent's head, death was swallowed up in victory, He destroyed the guilt and dominion of sin, and demolished the gates of hell. True, He was wounded in that battle; but, while He seemed to succumb, while Satan and his army raised a shout of victory, He was, nevertheless, the conqueror. On the third day after the battle He came forth triumphantly, all His enemies retreating before His presence. And, behold, as He goes forth to meet His disciples, His first proclamation to them is: "*Peace* be with you!" and again I say: "*Peace* be with you!" It was He, Shiloh, the Peaceful, distributing the blessings, the spoils of His victory: peace with God and peace with all men. And to this day the blessings of His peace are offered to sinners by means of His Word, the Gospel of the kingdom. It is still abundant as milk and wine in a fruitful land, and all are invited to come and enjoy it, for Shiloh is calling to-day as of yore: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. In me ye have peace. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." This peace of God is the fruit of forgiveness of sins, it passeth all understanding and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. It is our comfort in distress, our hope and joy in all the vicissitudes of life; and, having this peace, we need not fear the last bitter foe, but are able to overcome him; and entering the valley of the shadow of death, we may rejoice: "Now, O Lord, lettest Thou Thy servant depart in *peace*."

Thus, in comparing the prophecy and the fulfillment, we have a wonderful identification of Jesus of Nazareth as the promised Messiah. Shiloh is Christ Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, of the tribe of Judah, and unto Him all the nations of the world are gathering. Let us, too, render homage to Him! Let us accept His offer of peace! Let us follow our Leader to the promised land! May His strength and grace keep us in His kingdom of grace and lead us to the kingdom of glory, where perfect peace awaits us. Amen.

T. S.

Funeral Sermon.

Ps. 23.

It is a very sad occasion upon which we are gathered together. Before us in yonder casket lie the remains of one who was always hale and hearty, strong and vigorous in body and mind. Having never been ill in her life, she could at first hardly realize that she was ill, much less that her days on earth were numbered. Having a strong constitution, she had always ably and faithfully assisted her widowed mother in the many arduous household duties, and it was a heavy cross for her to feel her strength ebbing away. Married but two years ago, and having a happy home, a good husband, and a sweet little daughter, it was not an easy matter for her to be reconciled to the thought that she was to leave all that was near and dear to her on earth. But faith conquered, and she told me repeatedly, "I am perfectly satisfied to depart. The will of the Lord be done." Though she had a good home on earth, she knew she was going to a better home in heaven. And though she suffered much misery in her last days, she prayed to Jesus to release her speedily, and she found comfort and strength in His Word. The last word which I read to her, on Sunday afternoon but a few hours before her death, was the text just read to you,

THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

From this pearl of Psalms, read to the dear departed in her dying hours, let us now draw comfort, instruction, and admonition.

The Psalm begins: "The Lord is my Shepherd." Not every one can say this. There are those who are not of Jesus' fold, who do not believe in Him, who do not accept Him as their Savior and Redeemer. They are the unbelievers and the self-righteous. They want no shepherd, no leader and guide. They are like sheep going astray. By nature all men are like this, for it is written: "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way." And yet there are some who have a shepherd, and say: "The Lord is my Shepherd."

David, the writer of our text, was one of these. He knew how weak, defenseless, and sinful he was by nature, and how sorely he needed a shepherd, a helper and redeemer. He had experienced the love and mercy of God. He had been called into the fold. He had been fed with food celestial. He had been protected by power divine. In sweet assurance of faith he therefore cried out: "The Lord is my Shepherd." If He be a Shepherd to no one else, He is a Shepherd to *me*; He cares for *me*, watches over *me*, preserves *me*.

Thus every Christian, every one who repents of his sins and believes in Jesus Christ, can and will say.

Also the departed could say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." In infancy already the Good Shepherd placed her under His pastoral care. He called her into His fold by having her baptized in His name. He had her instructed in His Word. He had her educated in a Christian school. He had her confirmed in His Church. He knew her as His own. She was a sheep of His pasture. Well could she therefore say, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

And what a sweet comfort this is to you who mourn her death, to know that the Lord, the Almighty, was her Shepherd. For since Jesus was her Shepherd, His word has come to pass concerning her: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

The Psalm continues: "I shall not want." These words are a sort of inference from the first statement—they are sententious and positive. David, knowing that the Lord was his Shepherd, knew also that his Shepherd was able to supply all his needs. He who has Jesus for his Shepherd lacks no good thing. Jesus once asked His disciples, "Lacked ye anything?" and they replied, "Nothing." The Good Shepherd always provides for His sheep. Hence he whose Shepherd is the Lord can say, "I shall not want."

Also the departed could say, "I shall not want." The Lord did not let her lack temporal things. He who feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the lilies of the field also provided for her. She suffered no want. And the Lord also provided her with spiritual things. He gave her His Word and Sacrament. She possessed the means of grace pure and unadulterated. She had the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation. She partook of the Sacrament, which is a pledge of the remission of sins. She was clothed in Jesus' righteousness. Ah, indeed, she could well say, "I shall not want."

What a sweet comfort to know that she had everything that she needed for body and soul, for time and eternity!

The Psalmist continues: "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures." This is a beautiful picture of peace and rest. The Psalmist would say: "Though I am weary and worn, exhausted in body and mind, the Lord grants me sweet repose." The green pastures in which the Lord makes His sheep to lie down are the Scriptures. They impart to the Christian peace of conscience and tranquillity of mind, for they tell him that all his sins are blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ, that the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and that there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.

Also the departed the Lord made to lie down in these green pastures of His blessed Word. When doubts or fears assailed her, this Word imparted to her the peace of God which passeth all understanding. It gave her conscience rest, and it told her of the rest that remains to the people of God, the heavenly rest into which she should enter.

The Psalmist says: "He leadeth me beside the still waters." The Psalmist would say: If I were left to myself I would surely go astray, but thanks be to God, my Good Shepherd leadeth me. He leadeth me to the still waters, to the place where I shall be quickened and refreshed. I could not go there myself; I was weak and feeble, and did not know the way; I needed His guidance, and He did guide me, guide me to the place where I was cleansed and cheered and strengthened.

Also the departed could say: "He leadeth me beside the still waters." Jesus led her in her infancy to the still and quiet waters of Holy Baptism. There did He cleanse her from all sin and unrighteousness, there did He adopt her as His own, there did He make a covenant with her which stands forever. Baptism being "a washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost," it was a great comfort to her that she was a baptized Christian, for "as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." The Lord led her to the still waters, to the place of refreshment, when He brought her to Holy Baptism; and what He there, in Baptism, promised her He has now given her, for now He has taken His child home, now He has led her to the place of eternal refreshment, to the living waters of everlasting life. — What a sweet comfort for you who mourn her death!

"He restoreth my soul." When the Psalmist's soul was sinful, the Lord cleansed it; when it was weak, the Lord strengthened it; when it was sorrowful, the Lord restored it, *i. e.*, revived it. The Lord did that. No man could restore the soul. Soul-sorrow can be banished only by the Lord. And He does this through His Word.

He restored the soul of the departed. True, His Law did not restore her soul, for His Law told her that she was a transgressor, a sinner like all men, and, therefore, under the wrath of God. But while pining away under the blows of the divine Law, the Gospel restored her soul. When, for instance, she thought that the Lord had forgotten her because of her great misery and she was told that the Lord says in His Word: "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," her soul was revived. When worry filled her soul concerning the loved ones she was about to leave behind and she was told that He who had helped them hitherto would help them also in the

future, her soul was comforted. When praying and longing to be taken hence and her soul was troubled because her prayer was not answered at once, the Lord restored her soul by His Word in which He told her: "Mine hour is not yet come, but my grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." And when, during the night before her death, her soul was afflicted and she asked her husband to read a prayer to her, her soul was again revived and refreshed.

Dear friend, is your soul restored? restored to life, to hope, to faith, and enjoyment of God and His Word? If not, remember, God will restore your soul, but He will do so only through His Word. Hence, would you be sure that you are a true Christian, a child of God, an heir of heaven, that you will not perish, but be saved when you die—hear and heed the Word!

The Psalmist continues: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." He would say: The Lord kept me in the pure doctrine, so that I know what is right and what is wrong, and having shown me the paths of righteousness He also leads me in them. And this He did, not because I was better than others, but "for His name's sake," *i. e.*, because of His grace and mercy.

Also the departed could say: "He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." She was a Christian and led a Christian life, and though she was not perfect—no more than we are—she was sorry for her sins and asked God to forgive them, and He forgave them and led her, led her in the paths of piety and virtue, and covered her imperfections and shortcomings with the robe of Jesus' righteousness.

Do you, dear friend, walk in the paths of righteousness, or do you live as the world does? Do you use God's Word and Sacrament, or do you neglect these means of grace? Do you lead a pious, godly life, or are you conformed to this world? Remember, God leads only in the paths of righteousness, and if you are not walking in those paths, then you are not led by God, but by Satan. Turn, then, turn, then, and let the Lord lead you, lead you in the paths of righteousness *now* and in the paths of eternal righteousness *hereafter*.

The Psalmist says: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me." The Psalmist knew that a time was coming when he would have to die, but he did not fear death. He knew that the Lord of death was with him, and that therefore he should not enter death, but only its shadow, yea, that he should walk *through* the valley of that death. Who does not see expressed here the glorious hope of the resurrection?

Also the departed did not fear to die. She knew that Jesus, her Good Shepherd, had abolished death and had brought life and immortality to light. She knew that Jesus was with her even in that last and trying hour. And when her weary soul was about to wing its flight heavenward, the last sigh, the last words that she lisped were: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" Thus she fell asleep.

Asleep in Jesus! blessed sleep!
From which none ever wakes to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes.

Her soul has now walked through the valley of the shadow of death and entered the realms of light, and her body will be laid to rest in God's acre to await the summons from on high on the great resurrection day.

What a sweet comfort to know that she was prepared to die, and died saved. Can you also, dear friend, say: "Though *I* walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me"? If not, repent and believe the Gospel, for you know not when you may be called hence. Who would have thought that the departed, so young and strong, would have been called hence in the prime of life? Therefore "watch and pray, for you know not what hour your Lord doth come."

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies." The Psalmist had his enemies. He would not have been like his Lord if he had not. If Christians had no enemies, they might have to fear that they were not the friends of God, for "the friendship of the world is enmity with God." But in spite of his enemies, God granted the Psalmist quietude and serenity. He prepared a table before him, so that he could sit down and eat as if he were in perfect peace.

Even so did the Lord prepare a table before the departed in the presence of unseen enemies, the table on which was celebrated the Holy Supper. Having humbly confessed her sins and her faith, she received the body and blood of the Savior. Thereby the redemption of Christ was sealed to her, and she received strength for her last struggle, the battle of life and death.

This table, this Sacrament, the Lord has prepared also for you, dear friend. Do you approach it? do you long for it? or do you neglect and despise it? O let not the Lord prepare it for you in vain. You deprive yourself of a great blessing and call down upon yourself God's wrath.

"Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over." Kings and priests were anointed with oil. Christians are anointed

with the Holy Ghost. Christians, too, are kings and priests, for John writes: "Christ loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father."

Also the departed was anointed with the Holy Ghost who in Baptism was shed on her abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior. And now she stands, arrayed in royal and priestly robes, before the throne of God forever; for the Psalm closes:

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The Psalmist dwelt in the house of God on earth, he attended divine services; but there above he dwells in the temple not made with hands.

Even so the departed was a member of Christ's Church and attended divine services, but now dwells in the house of the Lord forever. O happy, blessed lot!

Would you not like to share it, dear hearer? O then make diligent use of the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments. Repent daily of your sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and form the good and earnest purpose with the assistance of God the Holy Ghost henceforth to amend your sinful life. Thus let the Lord be your Shepherd, and then you shall not want in body and soul, in time and eternity. God grant it to us all for Jesus' sake. Amen.

O. K.

Outlines for Sermons on the Gospel-Lessons.

First Sunday in Advent.

MATT. 21, 1—9.

Our Gospel reminds us that we are again at the gates of a new church year. The joyful notes of Advent are filling the air, and everywhere the theme of Jesus' coming is resounding. Our Gospel relates the coming of Jesus to Zion, Jerusalem. A joyful event, indeed, and one concerning which many a prophet has given testimony. In the fulfillment, Zion, the whole Church, rejoices.—Permit me to use this lesson this morning, as we set out upon a new course of the Gospel contemplations, somewhat typically, taking for my text the words v. 3, and for my theme,

**JESUS' MESSAGE TO US AT THE GATES OF A NEW CHURCH
YEAR: "I HAVE NEED OF THEM."**

I. *He has need of our hearts.*

All true religion is primarily a matter of the heart. Scripture clearly declares this. Mark 12, 30. Prov. 23, 26. Without the

heart, so-called religion is only a pretense, a formality, and to God an abomination. Matt. 15, 8. Ezek. 33, 31.—Religion being thus primarily a matter of the heart, the Savior says to us again to-day, as we enter upon a new church year: My disciples, I have further need of your hearts. I need them again in this coming year, I must have them.

a. He needs them that He may come into them, to you, your *King*. A singular instrument He chose to come to the daughter of Zion, her *King*; no earthly king would ever have chosen it freely. As then, so now at the gates of a new year, and at the gates of your heart. His kingdom is not of this world. “Behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” In your heart He will sit enthroned a King, prompting your thoughts, guiding your will, the lifespring of a consecrated being.

b. He needs our hearts that, in them, He may come *meekly*. An ass, humble animal, seems utterly out of harmony with a king’s triumphal entry. Custom, human propriety, selects the fiery steed, the gold and silver trappings. Not so this King, for He said that He would come meekly. And so He comes again to-day and asks for our hearts. The heart, by nature more wicked and obstinate than anything of all the world, and therefore more despicable—in it He would abide. Oh, the meekness of that King! May our response be that of the Gospel, may we straightway give our hearts.

II. *He has need of our mouths.*

Christ’s all-comprehensive command to His disciples unto the end of time is this: “Preach the Gospel,” etc. As Peter says to Christians in general: We are a royal priesthood, that we “should show forth the praises,” etc. Our indispensable response, when the Lord has opened our lips, is: “And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.” The Savior leaves no doubt about this when He says: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men,” etc.—And so the Savior again to-day says to us: I have need of your mouths. He says, in effect: I have opened your lips, I have bought you with a price, I have drawn you to me; now, therefore, let your mouths show forth my praise.

a. Show praise *to me*. He wants our welcome. He would dwell among our Hosannahs. With the innocence and sincerity of little children let them ring out.

b. Show praises *for me*. Tell it out among the nations that their Savior and their King is born. Tell it out that their iniquity is pardoned, their salvation is accomplished:

Oh, will we give Him our mouths?

III. *He needs our hands.*

When the Savior said: "Let your light so shine," etc., He announced the final test of true faith. "A good tree bringeth forth good fruit." A Christian will by his life, his actions, also point the way to the Father, to heaven. A true Christian is not one of those described Ezek. 33, 32. Therefore the Savior again to-day says to us: I have need of your hands, your deeds.

a. He needs them to make His path more smooth. For this purpose you have your means. Offer them that by them the Savior may go everywhere and bring salvation, peace to the hearts of men.

b. He needs them to do the works of love. He has hungry ones that must be fed, thirsty ones that need drink, etc. All these cry to Him. He would use us to help them in His name.

Let us serve Him straightway.—What a blessed year shall then lie before us—heart, mouth, and hands consecrated to the Savior. May God, our Savior, Himself work in us both to will and to do. Amen.

H. B. H.

Christmas Day.

LUKE 2, 1—14.

"Unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior." This joyful message was delivered to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem by an angel from heaven. To-day it is re-echoed from land to land and from sea to sea in hundreds of languages all over the world. O joyful day! Is there another day in the year to be compared with the festival of Christ's nativity as to universal joy? What joy in the world of childhood! Friends and relatives surprise one another with tokens of love. Even the unbeliever is drawn into the universal current of joy, and his heart is filled with gladness.—Much of the joy exhibited on Christmas Day is carnal, and many are joyful on this day and yet know nothing of the joy which should fill everybody's heart. You are not such, or you would not have come to the house of worship. You came here to hear the story of the Savior's wonderful birth and to rejoice, to find delight therein, though you have heard it time and again.

THE SAVIOR'S WONDERFUL BIRTH, AND THE JOY IT BRINGS TO ALL PEOPLE.

I. *The Savior's wonderful birth.*

When Isaiah beheld the Savior's birth by divine inspiration, he exclaimed, "Unto us a Child is born," etc., Is. 9, 6. And how wonderful is everything in the account of His birth!

a. The wonderful circumstances attending His birth, vv. 1—4. Caesar Augustus issues a novel decree that all the world should be

taxed. This taxation affects an obscure young couple in Judea, and they are compelled to journey to Bethlehem. For their sakes was this taxation made, that Mary should give birth to her Child in Bethlehem. The prophecy was that in Bethlehem Christ should be born, and the mightiest ruler on earth is an instrument in the hands of God to effect the fulfillment of the prophecy. How wonderful! — And Cyrenius was governor of Syria, a Roman official ruled over the Jews. Judea had been made a province of the Romans for some time, Gen. 49, 10, but not until this man was governor did the birth of Christ occur. He was governor about 490 years after the temple was rebuilt, Dan. 9, 24. How wonderful! — At that time there were certainly descendants of David who occupied a high rank and social standing, but God chose a poor, unknown virgin for the mother of His Son, that He might be born in poverty and lowliness, according to divine prophecy. How wonderful are all these circumstances attending the Savior's birth!

b. The wonderful birth itself, vv. 5—7. It was a birth contrary to the laws of nature. Mary was Joseph's espoused wife, Matt. 1, 18—21. Here the sign came of which Isaiah spake, Is. 7, 14. God connected Himself with us in the birth of the Savior. The Child born of the Virgin Mary is God become man, like unto us all, with the exception of sin. Can we think of a greater miracle than that God should become a helpless child, that the Invisible should become visible, that the Immeasurable should assume our flesh and blood? Blessed is he that does not view this account of the Savior's birth with the eyes of human reason, but simply believes that with God nothing is impossible, and that God was manifested in the flesh! Such faith brings true joy to the heart. — Let us consider now

II. *The joy which the Savior's birth brings to all people.*

a. The joy. *α.* By nature we are without true joy. We are miserable because we are sinners, vv. 8. 9. Why were the shepherds sore afraid? What is the real cause why man is frightened by a sudden clap of thunder, an earthquake, a tornado, etc.? Why do we not remain calm and composed and fear no evil, but expect all good things to come to us from our heavenly Father? Because we are sinners. We have an instinctive feeling that God is not pleased with us. Sin has made us miserable, has alienated us from our God, has brought woe, misery, and death upon us. Can we be truly joyful as long as our sins separate us from our God? No, dread, fear, fright must haunt us all the days of our lives, and we must expect to be punished for our sins in the hereafter. *β.* But true joy has come to us in the birth of the Savior, vv. 10—12. God came down from heaven to save us. What joyful news! Can there

be greater joy for you than to be convinced that God is reconciled with you, that in the Christ-child, who lived for you upon this earth, suffered, died for you, and thereby atoned for all your transgressions, He has forgiven you all your sins, that you have no more cause to fear anything because God is your Friend?

b. This joy is intended for all. Blessed words of the angel, "To all people." Do not say, God does not mean for me to be joyful over the Savior's birth; He has visited me with illness, with poverty, with shame, etc. Raise up your head. The Christ-child can and will turn all your sorrow into joy. Do not say, I have no claim upon the heavenly Child, for I am too great a sinner. Did He not say, "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance"? The joy over the Savior's birth is intended for all, even the greatest sinners.

Conclusion.—Let us all rejoice and not willfully exclude ourselves from the gladness which should be universal. And when ends life's transient dream we shall join the angel chorus, vv. 13. 14.

H. S.

Second Christmas Day.

LUKE 2, 15—20.

From the text now heard we learn that the preaching and singing of the angels was not in vain. For though the shepherds watched over their flocks with much care and great diligence, yet when they had heard the angel's message, they did not hesitate one moment to leave them now, and to hasten to see the wonderful Child which the angel called Christ, the Lord. Such was the glorious effect of the angel's preaching.

THE GLORIOUS EFFECTS WHICH THE ANGEL'S CHRISTMAS- MESSAGE: "THE SAVIOR IS BORN," PRODUCED ON THE HEARTS OF THE SHEPHERDS.

I. *The first effect is divine faith.*

LUTHER: "The first article is the faith of the shepherds, namely, the divine faith. Human faith clings to the person, believes and honors the word for the sake of him who speaks it; but the divine faith clings to the Word, which is God Himself." (John 4, 42.)

a. *What* did the shepherds believe? That these things came to pass, that is, that Christ was born, and that He was Lord and Savior.

b. *Why* did the shepherds believe this? Not because the *angel* said so, but because the *Lord* had made these things known. A striking example of divine faith. They believed the word, and they believed in Christ. They believed in Christ though they had never

seen Him. They believed in Him when they saw Him as a little child, poor and needy, and worshiped Him as a king, yea, as the Lord and Savior. A splendid example for all Christians!

II. *The second effect is holy zeal.*

a. For Christ's sake they forsook their flocks. They loved Christ more than their flocks.—First of all, we must seek the kingdom of God.

b. They made known the glad tidings concerning Christ.
a. Where? Publicly, v. 17; privately, v. 19. β . How were those who heard these tidings affected? All that heard it, wondered; etc. LUTHER: "With most of them perhaps the wonder did not last long. For experience teaches that the greater part of mankind are such miserable, corrupt people that God's grace is soon forgotten."—But Mary kept all these things, etc. LUTHER: "Mary gives us a better example. She is moved by the tidings; she retains them, inscribes them upon her heart, ponders them, speaks to herself about them, and says: These indeed are wonderful tidings, etc. . . . We ought to follow this example of the holy mother of Jesus, since for this very purpose it is presented to us, and keep the Word of God in our hearts and minds with much zeal and earnestness. (Song of Sol. 8, 6.)" The conduct of the shepherds in this matter affords a striking example to all true Christians, 1 Pet. 2, 9. Matt. 10, 32. 33. Here we have a strong argument in favor of missionary work, both at home and abroad. Let us preach and teach and speak and write and warn and testify, and rest assured that our labor is not in vain, 1 Cor. 15, 58.

III. *The third effect is humble gratitude.*

a. The shepherds returned to their calling. LUTHER: "In this conduct of the shepherds we find a splendid lesson. After they have received the glorious message from heaven and the true knowledge of Christ, they do not run out into the desert, as the foolish monks and nuns run into cloisters, but abide in their calling, and are useful to their fellow men. True faith compels no one to forsake his calling and to enter upon an extraordinary mode of life. . . . Christ did not come to change this. . . . The true change which was to be the glorious result of Christ's coming is this, that man should become changed in his heart. . . . The shepherds praised and glorified God and were satisfied. . . . If thou art faithful in thy calling, giving thanks unto Christ, then wilt thou serve God aright." This is true and God-pleasing gratitude.

b. The shepherds glorified and praised God for all the things that they had heard and seen.—Let us strive to be more like-minded with the pious shepherds. Let us thank, glorify, and praise God for all the things we have heard concerning Christ, our dear Savior, for His Word and Sacraments. So doing, we shall finally have a rich reward, like that of the shepherds: see Christ face to face.

J. C. A.